

# Contact

School of Social Work

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

2021—2022 Issue 1

SPECIAL PRINTED  
EDITION



## CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION



SCHOOL OF  
SOCIAL WORK



THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

Dear colleagues,

One of my social work heroes is Harry Specht, who served as dean of the School of Social Welfare at University of California at Berkeley for many years. He described our profession as “the caretakers of the consciousness of the community.” I’m taking that charge to heart, not only for our profession, but also for my new role as dean of UNC School of Social Work. I am a caretaker of our consciousness as an academic community of scholars and researchers and social work professionals. But I am more than a caretaker. I am also a cultivator, working to help our community grow and prosper.

Our School has an amazing history — you’ll read more about our first 100 years in this special printed issue of Contact magazine, which celebrates our centennial. That history is now the foundation for our next 100 years, and my focus is on our shared future.

In advancing our work in social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, my interest is in leading bold and courageous communication, conversations, and actions. We will effect change using our research, teaching, and our engagement with local, national, and global communities. Whitney Moore Young Jr. reminded us that, as social workers, we “support the strong, give courage to the timid, remind the indifferent, and warn the opposed.” As social work educators, we can do the required work by first deconstructing our historical roles in perpetuating bias and harm and then using those lessons to spark change. We must continue to be repairers of the breach.

As we work toward achieving our research, teaching, and service goals, my interest is in positioning our profession to engage in culture transformation. Culture transformation is dismantling systems of oppression and creating cultures and environments where everyone is seen, is heard, has meaning, feels valued, and contributes to our mission.

We are not short on public sentiment and expressions about the need to change systems, behaviors, practices, human conditions, and social circumstances. Our generation is not different from those of the past who have called for transformational change. The challenge that lies ahead is not our ability to center on what must change; the real work is cultivating the courage and wherewithal to move from rhetoric to action.

So, what does the future need from social work? What will be our greatest accomplishments in our next 100 years?

My commitment to you is that I will lead and lean forward, using my abilities and my position to spark change for good. And I invite each of you to join me. Let’s create the future we want.

Thank you for welcoming me into this academic community. I’m glad to be here.



Ramona Denby-Brinson, Ph.D.

Dean and Kuralt Distinguished Professor



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2021–2022 ISSUE 1

Contact is published by UNC School of Social Work for alumni and other stakeholders in the School’s mission. No state funds are used to print or mail this magazine.

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### SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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Cover images: (Top to bottom, left to right) Sociologist and Kenan Distinguished Professor Howard W. Odum; UNC-Chapel Hill’s first Black faculty member Hortense McClinton; Professor Maeda Galinsky (on table) with students; a man and Patrina Edwards Cearnal pose at the School’s front door in 1982; group of faculty, staff, and students in 2016; Marilyn Ghezzi engaging in a classroom discussion; masked student working on laptop computer; Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson.

## 4 100 years of impact

UNC School of Social Work celebrated its centennial year in 2020–2021, but due to COVID-19, the celebration has been extended. This issue of Contact revisits key moments in our history and anticipates the changes in our future.

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As this issue of Contact neared completion, UNC-Chapel Hill announced that it was renaming the dormitory formerly known as Aycock Residence Hall as the McClinton Residence Hall, honoring Hortense McClinton, the first Black professor at the University — and a member of our own School faculty for 18 years!

We invite you to read the University’s announcement here: <https://thewell.unc.edu/2021/12/03/names-of-two-tar-heel-trailblazers-selected-for-buildings> and read the transcript of our own interview with Professor McClinton on page 13.





# 100 years of impact

By Susan White

More than 100 years ago, North Carolina lawmakers faced perhaps one of the most important decisions of their time. Following the end of World War I, the U.S. economy was on the verge of expanding rapidly and, along with it, American wealth. But in the South, the narrative was a bit more complicated.

In North Carolina, more than 75% of residents lived in rural areas, and most were farmers who were facing the nation's rapid shift from agriculture to manufacturing. For these families, many of whom already lived in homes without running water, electricity or indoor bathrooms and whose children were out of school by the fifth or sixth grade, the struggle to eke out a living was becoming even more challenging.

Understanding that the state's overall success depended on the well-being of all of its residents, including its poorest, North Carolina's General Assembly forged a plan in 1919 to establish a statewide system of public welfare. This system would deploy trained welfare workers and superintendents to all 100

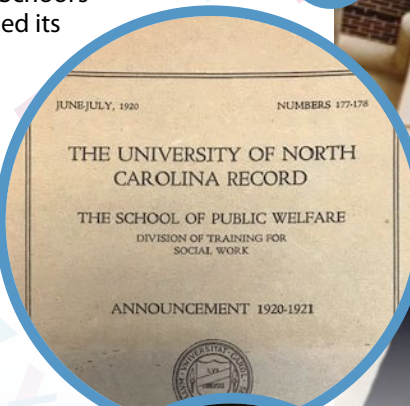
counties, with a focus on strengthening services and the livelihoods of children, families and communities across the state.

A year later, this plan would crystallize with the partnership of University of North Carolina President Harry Woodburn Chase. Like state lawmakers, Chase was well aware of the ramifications of ignoring the needs of rural communities. Moreover, Chase believed the University had a moral and civic responsibility to address the social problems of the time. With Chase's full support and in cooperation with the N.C. Department of Charities and Public Welfare and the American Red Cross, the University launched its School of Public Welfare in 1920.

The mission at the time, according to state historical records: to educate and develop a clinical workforce of "country social workers," individuals trained with the hard and soft skills to work in the rural South. Sociologist and Kenan Distinguished Professor Howard W. Odum, who specialized in the social problems of the southern United States,

was tapped as the School's first dean and guided its growth for the first decade.

Over the following 30 years, the School's name evolved several more times before officially becoming UNC School of Social Work in 1950. Although initially founded as a training program for largely inexperienced public welfare workers, the School gradually grounded its expertise in social work practice across a range of fields, including health, mental health, community practice, administration and policy practice.



The decision to build a research program in the mid to late 1980s solidified the School's rise to national attention as social work research faculty came to introduce the production of and use of empirical evidence in practice settings. These early researchers helped to transform the School's curriculum and lay the groundwork for additional partnerships to address some of North Carolina's most pressing social and economic problems, including violence prevention, substance use, and care for the aging. They also initiated the path forward for a new Ph.D. program that, for the last 30 years, has produced

preeminent social work scholars who embrace cutting-edge research design to improve practice and advance social interventions.

The journey to become one of the nation's best social work schools has, like most historical narratives, included ups and downs. The 1995 completion of the School's \$10 million building certainly deserves mention. After years of bouncing around different spaces on campus, the School moved into its new 75,000-square-foot building, which finally gave the program the long-awaited physical presence and the national clout to attract top-dollar donations and top-notch students and faculty.

Other historic milestones include the appointments of social work professor Hortense McClinton, UNC-Chapel Hill's first Black faculty member, in 1966; School of Social Work Dean John Turner, UNC-Chapel Hill's first Black dean, in 1981; Kimberly Strom, the School of Social Work's first female (interim) dean in 2000; Travis Albritton, the School of Social Work's first associate dean for diversity, equity and inclusion, in 2018; Mimi Chapman, the School's first

professor to receive the Edward Kidder Graham Faculty Service Award in 2016 and the first social work professor elected faculty chair in 2020 and Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson, the School of Social Work's first Black female dean, in 2021.

Still, as former Dean Gary Bowen noted in a message to students, faculty and staff in June 2020, the School has fallen short in realizing its commitment to racial justice and to dismantling structural racism. Even after 100 years of historic growth, professors and students of color continue to remind our School that much more work is needed to identify and address internal legacy systems that have created and maintained patterns of oppression. These systems have prevented faculty, students and staff of color from sharing their voices and having access to resources and opportunities of all kinds. Collective efforts to reshape the School in more equitable ways began in earnest last year and will continue for the foreseeable future.

Ultimately, social workers are driven by a passion and commitment to do good. So, for every accomplishment

*Images: (Far left) Red Cross Camp Gordon, Georgia — World War I — Howard Odum (right) in Bureau of Home Service in Camps and Camp Cities; (middle, top to bottom) 1920 The School of Public Welfare Division of Training for Social Work Announcement; Harry Woodburn Chase; Hortense McClinton; Travis Albritton; (far right) Our building namesakes at its dedication in 1996: businessman Jack Tate, former dean John Turner, and legendary journalist Charles Kuralt.*







achieved over the last 100 years, there will no doubt be many more to come, said Dean Denby-Brinson.

“UNC School of Social Work has been at the heart of advancing the profession of social work. We have blazed new trails and, in partnership with many, we have accomplished so much. What excites me now is the story that will be written about the next 100 years. What will social workers of the future say about this time? What will be the meaning and impact of our work? It is now our time to lead the profession. We can create the future we want to see. Let us do so driven by our values, courage, and conviction.”

## TEACHING

When the School of Public Welfare at UNC-Chapel Hill emerged during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was considered the first collegiate school of its kind in the South and one of only 17 formal social work training programs across the country. Social workers from the previous century were largely untrained and often volunteers who served individuals and families living in poverty. But by the 1920s, practitioners skilled in social casework were in high demand, including as counselors for treating “shell shocked” soldiers returning home from World War I.

Perhaps to no surprise, some of the dozen or so full-time students who enrolled in the School’s very first courses had served with the American Red Cross, providing relief to the nation’s armed forces. In fact, the need for Red Cross social workers remained so great at the time that the charity offered scholarships of \$75 per month to students who committed to serving with the organization one year after completing their training.

Red Cross leaders also advocated for the academic training of social workers and for the elevation of the profession. One of the School’s first professors, J.F. Steiner, a former national director of educational service for the American Red Cross, argued that universities should be just as responsible for educating social workers as they were for educating lawyers, doctors, engineers, and teachers.

A professor of social technology, Steiner was among the School’s initial handful of faculty, which included members with expertise in sociology, rural social science, and community organization. The School, once housed in the basement of Alumni Hall, also drew faculty from across campus, including those with experience in economics, psychology, history and government, and sanitary engineering.

From the beginning, School and

University leaders emphasized pairing classroom instruction with training in the field, giving students the chance to learn hands-on skills in real time. In those early years, students were most likely to work in direct practice and were assigned to public welfare agencies mainly in counties adjacent to the university. Today, students have the opportunity to work in public and private agencies across North Carolina, including in departments of social services, community providers of mental health services, substance abuse agencies, hospitals, domestic violence agencies, homeless shelters, and public schools. Those interested in programming, administration, policy development, and advocacy are also placed with state and national think tanks, nonprofits, and other organizations.

Although the School initially drew students interested in a helping profession, many of today’s

graduates enter the MSW program with a wealth of volunteer and practice experience including global service, and they are committed to changing social and political systems from within.

“Many of these students have enjoyed successful careers in advertising, project management, and other corporate positions, but yearn for an opportunity to make a difference,” said Tina Souders, the director of the School’s 3-Year MSW Program in Winston-Salem. “We’ve found these students to be very driven and focused on their educational goals.”

Over the years, the MSW curriculum has evolved as well. Early core courses were organized under five themes: state and public institutions; the community; family and the individual; methods of organization and administration; and field work. Founding-year classes

familiarized students with a variety of issues including social movements and social reform, rural economics, the development of community as a social phenomenon, and family welfare. Students were expected to specialize in one of the recognized departments of social work, such as child welfare, mental hygiene, industrial problems, housing, public health, home economics, or delinquency.

As the School’s enrollment increased and new faculty were appointed, the curriculum adapted to respond to society’s changing and complex times.

For example, as desegregation slowly spread across the South, particularly within public schools, social work professor Hortense McClinton created and launched a new class on

institutional racism and implications for human services. Other new courses followed on marriage and family, social work and the law, social welfare policy, citizen participation and grass roots organization, substance use and addictions, mental health, and the criminal justice system, among others.

In more recent years, courses have been updated to include content on welfare reform, the Affordable Care Act, trauma, immigration, practice in global settings, critical race and feminist queer theory, history of oppression, and environmental justice. Other specialized areas of study have also been added, including the Child Welfare Education Collaborative program, Substance Use and Addiction Specialist program, and UNC-PrimeCare, an integrated healthcare program that trains and prepares students for practice within the medical community.

“Our curriculum continues to expand and evolve to ensure that our social work graduates are the most competent and prepared as they can be,” said Lisa de Saxe Zerden, senior associate dean for MSW education. “Students have to be made aware of policy changes as they happen and how they impact individuals, communities, and social work practice.”

A growing need to accommodate working professionals and parents has led to more degree options in the MSW program over the last half century. In

addition to the full-time 2-Year MSW Program, students now have the choice of applying to a 3-Year MSW Program (in either Chapel Hill or Winston-Salem) or an Advanced Standing MSW Program (either 12 months or 20 months). Moreover, students can pursue dual degrees in public health, divinity, public administration, and law.

Perhaps one of the most significant advances has involved how students are educated to think about treatment models. Early classes simply taught students to follow current models of therapy without question. Today, students must think critically about issues, examine the evidence behind psychodynamic approaches and consider new and innovative interventions.

Over the years, students have challenged the School to strengthen its teaching around institutionalized oppression, discrimination, and racial equity and inclusion. Under the direction of Associate Dean Travis Albritton, the School’s newly created Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has been working with faculty, staff, and students since 2018 to create inclusive excellence within every function of the School, including curriculum and co-curriculum development.

Such changes further strengthen the School’s commitment to the social work profession. Over the last 100

**“This program’s balanced curriculum, wise counsel from its professors, and authentic fellowship with my cohort gave me the knowledge, skills, and confidence required. As a technical expert lead at JBS International, I help rural communities build capacity throughout the entire spectrum of behavioral health services: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery. I continue to draw upon my MSW training – ever mindful to keep my work person-centered, community-based, and consortia-driven – inclusive of the voices of those whom our rural communities serve.”**

— Donald McDonald, MSW ‘16

*Images: (Far left) Florence Soltys teaches the course Death and Dying in the summer of 1989. (Middle, top to bottom) J.F. Steiner, students in the Reading Room in 1978, Marilyn Ghezzi classroom, Michael Lambert classroom, Tina Souders classroom.*



years, more than 5,600 students have earned their MSW degrees from UNC School of Social Work. Without a doubt, these students have been prepared to make a difference, said Valerie Arendt, executive director of the North Carolina Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

“The contributions that the UNC School of Social Work has made to our society are immeasurable,” Arendt said. “The School has taught thousands of social workers over the last hundred years to be competent, ethical professionals who provide essential services to every community in North Carolina and throughout the United States.”

## RESEARCH

Historically, social work relied largely on research and theory from other professions and disciplines. But this approach began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, when leaders in the profession committed to strengthening the bases of social work practice by developing the capacity to conduct high-quality original research.

Schools of social work across the country responded to this challenge, including at UNC-Chapel Hill. The march to the forefront of this effort began under the visionary leadership of Dean John Turner (1981–1992), who helped build the School of Social Work’s first development office. Social work scholars such as Alan Keith-Lucas, who

worked to change the philosophy and practices in child welfare, and Maeda Galinsky, who pioneered group work and intervention research, helped established the School’s initial research. For the School to gain national recognition, Turner knew funding was crucial for endowed professorships to attract even more sought-after scholars.

### KICKSTARTING A PROGRAM

The work of Gary Nelson and Gary Bowen, who brought expertise in aging policy and in services to military families, respectively, helped to strengthen the School’s portfolio. With Dennis Orthner, whose interests were rooted in issues affecting vulnerable children and families, Turner also had someone experienced in kickstarting a research program. Orthner had done the same at the University of Georgia and quickly established the Human Services Research and Design Laboratory, which helped to boost the School’s presence within the social work scientific community.

During these faculty-building years, the School attracted other prominent new scholars with a diversity of experience, such as Kathleen Rounds, a public health and social work researcher recognized for her evaluations of support services for people with HIV, services for pregnant and postpartum women using drugs and alcohol, and adolescent parenting programs. With Iris Carlton-LaNey, the School welcomed a scholar committed

to social justice and steeped in the history of African American social welfare, including around issues of aging, caregiving, and rural community practices.

Among the School’s most significant steps: the creation and launch of its Ph.D. program in 1993 with, perhaps, the strongest curriculum on research methods in the country, including the design and development of new interventions. Today, the School’s doctoral program remains a leader in training students to use rigorous study designs and analysis methods to assess the impact of social interventions.

For Tanya Smith Brice, Ph.D. ’03, such a grounding prepared her to be a leader in social work education. Brice, one of 127 total Ph.D. graduates from the School, has served in tenured positions at several universities, including as dean of the College of Professional Studies at Bowie State University. She currently serves as vice president of education for the Council on Social Work Education.

“UNC-Chapel Hill prepared me to assess the state of social work education and to develop innovative strategies to ensure that social work educators support our students to effectively address social issues,” she said.

### STRENGTHENING FUNDING FOR RESEARCH

In those early years, the School’s focus on research methods aligned with the scholarship

of incoming faculty, including Mark Fraser, an intervention researcher with expertise on risk and resilience, child behavior, child and family services, and research methods. One of the School’s first distinguished professors, Fraser was instrumental in developing grantwriting support for faculty to help strengthen the School’s federal funding portfolio. He also served as the first director of the School’s Jordan Institute for Families, an initiative begun through a \$1 million gift from Michael Jordan, his mother Deloris Jordan, and the Jordan family. Originally

conceived to promote evidence-supported programs across the state and the country, the Jordan Institute continues to connect communities and social work research policy and practice to advance strategies to support families across the lifespan.

By the early- to mid-1990s, under the direction of Dean Richard Edwards and with nationally known faculty on board, research funding and projects began to flourish, including those focused on issues such as school success, violence prevention, child welfare, and aging. At the same time, faculty members were instrumental in founding peer organizations, including the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), which promoted research scholarship within the profession. With SSWR support, UNC-Chapel Hill founded the Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research, one of the profession’s leading research journals today.

“It was a frothy time with great debates on methodology,

growing federal interest in social work research, and cadres of new Ph.D. graduates who were seeking funding to design and evaluate both prevention and intervention social welfare programs,” Fraser recalled.

### EXPANDING ITS REACH

For the last two decades, the School has organized its research focus across core areas including care needs and services for older adults; evidence-building in child welfare; family relationships and interpersonal violence; health and behavioral health; human services outcomes and response to human trafficking; programs on parenting and family processes; services and interventions for justice-involved people with mental illness; social research methods and data analytics; and well-being and service delivery to marginalized populations.

Faculty leading projects in these areas have attracted tens of millions of dollars in local, state, and national funding, including from the Centers for Disease Control, National Institute of Education, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Justice, private foundations, and other agencies. In fact, 2021 was a record-breaking funding year for faculty research with 82 grant proposals submitted totaling \$60.5 million in requested funding.

In our doctoral program, students are targeting innovative research areas that are critically important to society, such as intersectional identities and mental health, children’s experience of food insecurity, decision-making in child welfare, and how students of color thrive in predominately white-serving colleges and universities.

“Others are exploring how our perceptions of populations as vulnerable morph into a vision of that population as threatening when certain factors come together such as climate shifts and high conflict,” said Mimi Chapman, associate dean for doctoral education. “We have students studying housing policy and working on big data approaches to various issues. We have students studying health disparities and new approaches to psychosocial well-being in the midst of severe health

challenges. This is all exciting stuff that takes us into new territory, both as a doctoral program and as a school.”

Moreover, students and faculty continue to pursue cutting-edge research that will have a global impact in advancing equity, transforming systems, and improving lives, Chapman added.

“That is a recipe for success and growth,” she said. “I’m excited about what comes next.”

## SERVICE

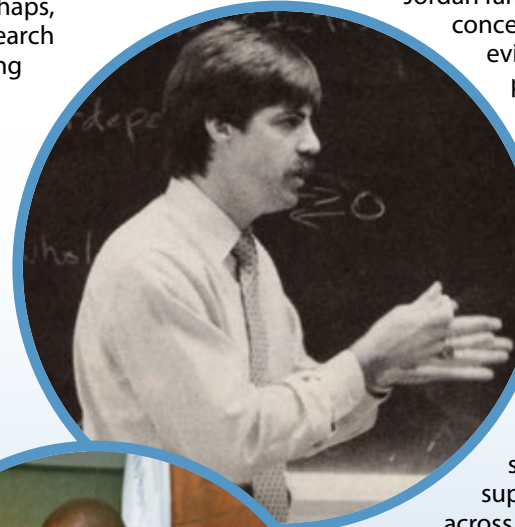
Public service and engagement with North Carolina communities is a core mission of UNC School of Social Work that dates back to its very beginnings. The School’s founding is inextricably tied to the need to educate and train welfare workers for a growing economically and socially diverse state. Over the last 100 years, our School faculty, students, and staff have produced programs and provided consultations, trainings, evaluations, resources, and research aimed at improving communities from the mountains to the coast.

At the forefront of this effort is the School’s long-standing relationship with public, private, and nonprofit agencies that provide hands-on field education opportunities for MSW students. These internship experiences are integral to a student’s whole education and give them the chance to develop and practice the knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom in real-world situations. In return, these students keep employers informed on evidence-based practices and help to fill critical workforce needs. Altogether, students complete 130,000 hours annually in the field as part of their educational and professional preparation and contribute services valued at more than \$1.2 million annually to North Carolina.

“The work that these students provide demonstrates our School’s commitment to investing in our communities and supporting organizations that are assisting some of our state’s most vulnerable residents,” said Rebecca Brigham, assistant dean of field education.

**“While the faculty and the coursework certainly helped me learn about social work research and practice, the doctoral program at UNC offered the chance to develop my leadership skills. I had so many opportunities: helping to found a social work doctoral student organization, writing a successful course development grant, serving on the College’s doctoral program committee, and working with the Center for Teaching Excellence to strengthen education across the university. These early experiences of organizing, curriculum development, advocacy, and interdisciplinary collaboration helped position me for a future in academic administration.”**

— **Lori Messinger, dean, College of Social Work, University of Tennessee Knoxville**



Images: (Top to bottom) John Turner during his military service as a Tuskegee Airman; Gary Bowen; Michael Jordan at the 1996 dedication of the Jordan Institute for Families; Maeda Galinsky.



**“I am most proud of the legacy of our School’s faculty and graduates, who understand and value life-changing work and who continue to impact the lives of people at every stage of life. Through teaching, research, and service, our School of Social Work brings positive change to individuals, families, and communities across the world. With such a rich history, I can only imagine what the next 100 years will bring.”**

— **Louise Coggins, chair of the School’s Board of Advisors and a 1980 MSW graduate**

For employers, the opportunity to be exposed to new theories of practice from interactions with social work students is essential for the continuous learning of agency employees, said Lindsey Arledge, MSW ’94, chief of social work service for the Durham VA Health Care System.

“Everyone benefits from ‘fresh eyes’ and new perspectives, and students most definitely bring that,” Arledge said. “They also have a way of highlighting some of the social work values that can get challenged when you work for a bureaucratic agency.”

### MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Decades before the Americans with Disabilities Act became law, the School was working to protect people with disabilities. For example, in 1963, the Developmental Disabilities Training Institute (DDTI) launched as part of the Jordan Institute for Families to ensure the well-being and inclusion of people with intellectual, developmental, and co-occurring disabilities. Much of the institute’s focus centered on providing training and technical assistance to

those serving the state’s intellectual and developmental disability population, to further support the transition of individuals from institutions back into their own communities.

By the late 1970s, the School also began offering trainings and workshops to help intensify the interest of social workers in the Black experience. Assistant professor Audrey Johnson, a founding member of the National Association of Black Social Workers, created, organized, and launched a long-running series known as the Black Experience Workshops. These seminars brought together academic, state, and national leaders to participate in critical conversations about racism in America and touched on various topics such as health, economic, and social welfare issues.

School faculty have also played a significant role in meeting the needs of the state’s older adults. Professor Gary Nelson created and launched the Center for Aging Research and Educational Services (Cares) in 1987 to provide education, community engagement, and policy analysis to empower vulnerable adults and their families to experience choice and dignity in their lives. Most recently, Cares was awarded a \$4 million state contract to help increase the state’s availability of affordable and accessible housing and community services for older adults and people with disabilities. The goal is to ensure that people with disabilities have the same access to housing and community living as anyone without a disability.

The School has been just as critical in helping to strengthen programs and services for children and families in the state. For more than three decades, the Family and Children’s Resource Program (FCRP) has worked closely with federal and state agencies to improve interventions for reducing the number of children in foster care and to strengthen services to foster care families. In addition to developing custom training and coaching programs, FCRP staff also evaluate program effectiveness; facilitate discussions involving community organizations, clients, and stakeholders; and partner with the N.C. Division of Social Services to share best practices in child welfare and foster care.

### TRAINING ON BEST PRACTICES

In addition, the School of Social Work has a history of meeting the continuing professional development needs of the state’s behavioral health professionals. For the last 30 years, the School has partnered with the North Carolina Area Health Education Program to provide the latest training to the state’s mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities practitioners. In total, School faculty, adjunct faculty, field instructors, and doctoral students provide more than 450 hours of continuing education programs and research-based training to nearly 4,000 participants annually.

“The School’s partnership with the NCAHEC program is such a valuable service to the state because our faculty and consultant trainers can share their research and expertise with professionals in the field, keeping them up to date on the latest practices and helping to better the lives of the people of North Carolina,” said Sherry Mergner, clinical associate professor and AHEC liaison for the past 25 years.

For the past 17 years, the School has also offered a Clinical Lecture Series to students, professionals, community members, and those caring for individuals and families. These lunchtime trainings focus on social work best

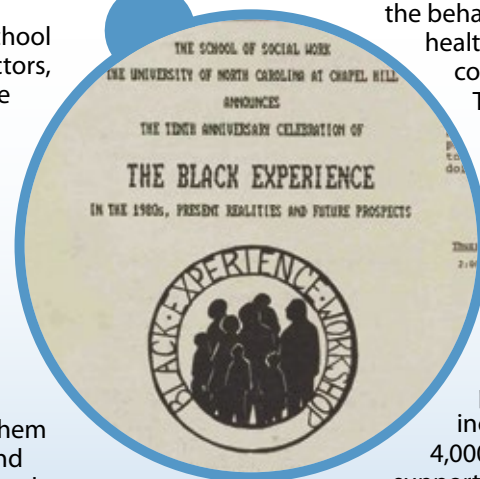
practices that are therapeutic, anti-oppressive, intersectional and centered on self-determination. Thousands have participated in nearly 200 workshops in person, via livestream, or using self-paced options.

Additional training and resources for families with premature infants or children with, or at risk for, developmental disabilities, behavioral disorders, or chronic illness have also been added over the years, as well as a free lecture series for field instructors in Winston-Salem.

Over the years, the School has been especially active in strengthening the state’s support services in the behavioral mental health and recovery communities.

Through the Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS), the School has trained tens of thousands of the state’s practicing behavioral health professionals, including nearly 4,000 certified peer support specialists — people living in recovery with mental illness or substance use disorder who offer support to others who can benefit from their lived experiences. In addition, BHS brings teams of health care, justice, and social services professionals together to address the needs of our communities, such as supportive resources for infants born exposed to opioids.

That the School will continue to provide support, education, and training to help improve the lives of families in crisis is beyond doubt. However, the future of this work depends on continued



Images: (Top to bottom) Kim Cuomo in field placement, The Black Experience Workshop program, Gary Nelson, Amy Blank Wilson.

## Timeline provides historical highlights

UNC School of Social Work has witnessed significant growth and achievement during its 100+ years as one of the nation’s leading schools of social work. Over the last year, our communications team worked together to produce a timeline that will introduce you to some of the key people, events and accomplishments that have marked turning points in our School’s history. Through each decade, you will see how the story of our School is woven into the extraordinary social history of our nation and world. You can find this timeline on our School’s website at: [ssw.unc.edu/about/our-foundation/our-centennial/historical-highlights](https://ssw.unc.edu/about/our-foundation/our-centennial/historical-highlights).

Please note, this timeline is not an exhaustive compilation — our history includes the work of thousands of faculty, staff, students, alumni and donors over the years. We are grateful for the contributions of each individual and each moment in time, although our resources were limited to include everything within this space. Our history is rich and vibrant, filled with high points as well as low points, and each has helped build our character as a professional school within the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

As we embark on our next 100 years of education, research and service, we will continue our work to improve our School and to fulfill our mission of advancing equity, transforming systems and improving lives.

1940s



### Military social work

During WWII, social workers take on war-related assignments, helping develop services for communities, families and soldiers impacted by the war, including those injured or with other health problems. Military social work eventually develops from this work.



### School rated one of the best in the South

By the 1940s, the School is already rated one of the best in the South and employs

innovation and entrepreneurship, added Gary Nelson, the director of the School’s Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab. Such a vision promotes partnerships where agencies and clients learn from each other and lean on each other’s expertise, he said.

“We remain committed to serving vulnerable and marginalized populations in North Carolina and around the world,” he said. “But the

only way we succeed in this mission is by spending time in our communities to better understand individual and family priorities and to address the questions that are important to them. This kind of work, which requires a holistic framework, will be vital in the years to come to developing solutions and driving outcomes that best serve a family’s needs.” ■



# 40 Years OF DONOR SUPPORT

By Karen Kornegay

During its first 60 years, UNC School of Social Work was stretched across campus in several buildings, without a permanent home. In 1980, the School launched its new advancement office, and a transformation began — a new building, scholarships, named professorships, and more — leading to the School's current position as one of the nation's top schools of social work.

"The name on the building [Tate-Turner-Kuralt] embodies the transformation," explained Daniel Lebold, one of the School's first advancement officers. The School's home is named in honor of Charlotte businessman John "Jack" Tate Jr., then-Dean John Turner, and journalist Charles Kuralt, three men who played key roles in transforming the School.

Turner led the initiative, establishing the SSW Foundation and hiring Elizabeth Benefield to lead advancement on a half-time basis. The School's first donation was a \$75 gift, Lebold remembered. Later that year, the School received \$75,000 in funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

Tate endowed the School's first professorship, the John A. Tate Distinguished Professorship for Children in Need, in memory of his father. He also served as the first chair of the School's advisory board and introduced Turner and the School to influential donors across North Carolina.

## THE RUBIK'S CUBE CONNECTION

Turner had a gift for connecting with business leaders, and he used a popular toy of the era, the Rubik's Cube, to help convey his message. He labeled each side of the cube with a different area of professional focus, including health, legal practice, education, and business. As he twisted the cube, he explained how social work collaborated with each profession to improve lives in North Carolina communities.

Kuralt, whose father had directed social welfare programs in Mecklenburg County, helped provide access to philanthropists at the national level. As

one of CBS's best-known broadcast journalists, he accompanied Turner on visits to potential donors in New York City and other major cities.

Together, the three men provided leadership for a \$10 million campaign in the early 1990s — a campaign that supported the School's new building.

Benefield and LeBold were followed by other advancement professionals, including Tricia Daisley, Mary Beth Hernandez, Jackie Leach Pierce, and Christina Hill-Coillot, and the School continued to expand its advancement activities.

## A GIFT FROM MICHAEL JORDAN

In 1996, legendary UNC-Chapel Hill basketball player Michael Jordan and his family founded the Jordan Institute for Families (JIF) with a \$1 million gift to the School. JIF programs have served all 100 counties in North Carolina with a combination of programming, research, and other initiatives focused on the well-being of children and families.

Generous donors (including Sam and Betsy Reeves; Richardson and Marilyn Preyer; Melvarene Adair and her son Ken Howard; Peter and Prudence Meehan; Carl and Susan Baumann; Henry and Sandra Hobbs; Rob and Meghan Cioffi; and many more) have established named professorships and scholarships to support social work in child welfare, domestic violence, poverty, and other areas of concern.

More recently, the School broke ground in 2019 for Tiny Homes Village, a community of 15 single-person residences for veterans and other persons with mental health disorders, with support from individual and corporate donors.

As it celebrates its centennial, the School is completing a \$23 million advancement campaign, providing donors with ongoing opportunities to invest in social work education. This work will continue to support a legacy of excellence and transformation as the School advances into its second 100 years. ■

## McClinton shares some of her favorite SSW memories

By Susan White

At 103, Hortense McClinton remains the oldest living retired professor from UNC School of Social Work. Hired amid a turbulent time in our nation's history, McClinton arrived on the Carolina campus in 1966, two years before the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and presidential candidate Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. A former research supervisor at the VA Hospital in Durham, McClinton was UNC-Chapel Hill's first African American faculty member.

At the School of Social Work, McClinton taught casework, human development, and family therapy. After encouragement from her students, she created a class on institutional racism, helping to lead early social work discussions and education on America's legacy of white supremacy. During her nearly two decades on the faculty, she also provided leadership through her work on the Committee on the Status of Women, Carolina Association of Disabled Students, and the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Minorities and the Disadvantaged.

McClinton, who was honored as a Social Work Pioneer by the National Association of Social Workers, retired from teaching in 1984 and continued living in Durham for years. Most recently, she moved to a new home within a retirement community in Silver Spring, Md., to be closer to family.

In celebration of the School's 100th anniversary, we caught up with McClinton to ask about her time at UNC-Chapel Hill and her favorite memories as a professor.



### Q: WHY DID YOU PURSUE A CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK?

A: I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and someone came from the Children's Bureau and talked to us during an assembly one Friday about social work and I thought, 'Well, that's what I want to be.' My homeroom teacher at the time told me I couldn't be a social worker because I didn't have any money. But I told my uncle, who was a physician, about it and he said, 'You can be one!' So, I went on to Howard University [in Washington, D.C.] and then to the University of Pennsylvania [where she earned her master's degree in social work].

### Q: YOU STARTED WORKING AT THE SCHOOL IN THE LATE 1960S. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE SCHOOL AT THAT TIME?

A: Because I had been a field supervisor for the School, I ended up teaching some of the students I had supervised. I just remember really enjoying the students. I enjoyed teaching them to

work with people. We taught them the importance of letting the clients decide what they wanted to do and then you helped them to do that.

### Q: WHAT DO YOU RECALL ABOUT THE COURSES YOU TAUGHT?

A: First, I thought I was learning, too! I was there seven years before I created the course on institutional racism. I wanted to be known as a teacher of social work rather than a teacher who taught about racism. But the students kept after me about starting that course, so I did. They became interested in the class because in the course I was teaching on human behavior, I was talking to them about things they had never heard before. And they kept coming back to me to teach it. John Turner was the dean then and he also encouraged me to develop the course, so I was given time off to do so.

### Q: WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THE STUDENTS AT THE TIME?

A: It was just nice working with them. So many of them wanted me to be their supervisor. I loved teaching because of the students. I loved talking to them about how to use the agency that they had to empower other people.

### Q: WHAT'S YOUR SECRET TO LONGEVITY?

A: I feel you just do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You treat everybody the same, and you live a good life. ■





## Our new dean: Ramona Denby-Brinson, Ph.D.

By Karen Kornegay

**U**NC School of Social Work has a new dean: Ramona Denby-Brinson, Ph.D., whose appointment began on Aug. 1, 2021. She also holds an appointment as the Kurlalt Distinguished Professor of Public Welfare Policy and Administration.

She is the 13th dean in the School's history and the first Black woman to serve in the deanship.

**"The path ahead of us energizes me."**  
— *Ramona Denby-Brinson*

Recognized nationally for her research on culturally adapted child welfare services, Denby-Brinson joins UNC-Chapel Hill with more than 27 years of experience in social work education and 17 years in

administration, scholarship, and mentorship.

She's also a wife and a mom, with three children (ages 15, 16, and 24). She's a native of Las Vegas, Nev., with nine siblings including a twin brother. She's a social worker who has been licensed since 1989.

Simply put, Denby-Brinson is someone who cares about people and their well-being. When she was offered the deanship, her first thought was, "Can I add value there?"

Students, faculty, and staff are positive that Denby-Brinson will, and they have already adopted "Dean Ramona" as their preferred name for her.

### INTENTIONAL AND INNOVATIVE

Denby-Brinson began her new responsibilities at a sprinter's pace, and she hasn't slowed for a moment.

"The path ahead of us energizes me," she says.

During her first 100 days at the School, she embarked on a "listening tour" — a mix of in-person meetings, Zoom meetings, and road trips to communities across North Carolina — to learn more about how people perceive the School.

She met with students and faculty in the 3-Year MSW Program at their Winston-Salem site in classrooms at Forsyth County Department of Social Services. She joined Zoom-based "town halls" where students, faculty, and staff shared their concerns about returning to campus after the COVID-19 lockdown. She visited donors in Greensboro, Charlotte, and other cities.

Denby-Brinson planned a three-part retreat, beginning in November 2021, for associate deans, assistant deans, and directors in a commitment to transformational leadership. She also met with current and retired faculty members who have deep understandings of the School's history, including Iris Carlton-LaNey, Ph.D.



*Ramona Denby-Brinson shares some thoughts during the first of three Transformational Leadership Retreat events held for the School's associate deans, assistant deans, and directors.*

Strengthening the School's sense of community is important, she explains: "We'll have to spend time building connections, getting the climate right, and earning trust."

Denby-Brinson has also begun to explore areas of focus in which the School might expand its efforts. One of these areas is online education, a popular trend among MSW programs nationwide.

Although the School has never offered an online degree option, faculty and students relied almost entirely on online classes as the COVID-19 pandemic began. On-campus classes resumed in fall 2021, but after 17 months of online classes, there's more interest in pursuing an online degree option.

Online education is an area in which Denby-Brinson has considerable experience. At Ohio State University (OSU), she was responsible for an asynchronous online degree program that served students from 34 states and three countries, with options for traditional and advanced standing students. As part of that program, students completed field placements at agencies in their home communities.

A proactive, forward-thinking approach will be essential in meeting the needs of students and communities that the School serves, Denby-Brinson says.

Driven by a *Futuring* perspective, Denby-Brinson believes, "Social work students will need skill sets we haven't even thought about — how does a social work degree need to transform around technologies?"

It's important to be a "signal watcher" and identify what the future will need from social workers, she adds. But the decisions aren't made yet: "My vision won't take form until I find out what your vision is."

### A PASSION FOR RESEARCH

Denby-Brinson has an impressive record of accomplishments in research, both as an investigator and as an administrator.

Throughout her career, she's focused on research as a catalyst for action — policy changes, new practices in the field, and curricula that extend the reach of her findings.

She has served as director of social science research and senior resident

**Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson has been a social work professional for more than 30 years. Here are a few of her career highlights:**

### PREPARATION

Ph.D., The Ohio State University (OSU)  
MSW, University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV)  
BSW, Arizona State University (ASU)

LSW and ACSW credentials, with social work experience in Tennessee, Nevada, and Arizona (including roles as medical social worker, guardian case manager, and assessment counselor)

### ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Associate dean of academic affairs and graduate studies chair, OSU College of Social Work

Associate dean of research, ASU Watts College of Public Service

Director of social science research, UNLV

Director, University of Nevada Las Vegas Center for Urban Partnerships

Full professor at UNLV, ASU, and OSU  
Assistant professor at University of Tennessee (UT)

Past president, National Association of Social Workers-Nevada  
Treasurer, Society for Social Work Research  
Board member, Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth

### RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY WORK

More than \$36 million in research funding  
Principal investigator on 16 projects  
Lead author or co-author on eight published books  
More than 70 published scholarly works  
More than 65 conference presentations

### HONORS (SELECTED ACCOLADES)

Senator Harry Reid Silver State Research Award  
The Ohio State University College of Social Work Hall of Fame  
Child Champion— Child Welfare League of America  
Child Welfare Advocate of the Year — Court Appointed Special Advocates



scholar at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) and as associate dean of research at Arizona State University's Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, where she directed a research enterprise averaging \$30 million in annual expenditures and oversaw operations of 23 centers and an institute. At OSU, she co-led a university-wide initiative to advance underrepresented faculty members — minority and women — in research.

Throughout her career, Denby-Brinson has published and presented extensively on the need to train child welfare workers to provide a culturally responsive approach when working with families to ensure they receive appropriate services and to help improve outcomes.

She looks for research projects that can produce strong impact, can be implemented broadly, and can provide opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. "It's important that our doctoral students see us doing research that matters to them," she explains.

To date, Denby-Brinson has received more than \$34 million in research funding from federal and state agencies, foundations, and university awards. Her most recent award, announced in June 2021, is a \$1.92 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through its Health Resources and Services Administration.

The grant will fund a four-year project to train students who will partner with cultural informants and specialize in services to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+ children, adolescents, and transitional-age youth and their families, especially those in need of mental and behavioral health care. The Ohio-based project will focus on delivery in high-need or high-demand areas and will include interprofessional partnerships with nursing and education.

### PROMOTING SYNERGY

Denby-Brinson brings a wealth of experience in helping faculty and staff develop their competitiveness for research funding and conceptualize approaches to address the grand challenges of our time. Her experience will be vital to promote synergy in



Laurie Selz-Campbell, Travis Albritton, JP Przewoznik, and Ramona Denby-Brinson welcome guests to the UNC School of Social Work reception hosted by the School at the Council for Social Work Education (CSWE) annual program meeting.

teaching, research, and community engagement.

She enjoys invigorating conversations with the School's associate dean of research and with center, institute, and research lab directors, discussing the resources needed to support faculty and staff in achieving their goals, conducting the research they are passionate about, and engaging in community projects that transform systems.

She often reminds the School community that, as part of the nation's first public university and with a 100-year foundation in social work, each person must be poised to answer this challenge question: *What does the future need from social work?*

"The future will need us to solve some of the most daunting challenges we face," she encourages faculty, staff, students, and alumni. She adds that the School will do so by expanding transdisciplinary teams, engaging diverse and new communities, and producing meaningful and impactful scholarship.

"To create the most public impact from our work, we must synergistically align the combined power of our scholarship/research, teaching innovation, and community engagement innovations," she says.

Denby-Brinson backs this up with

her own professional record, which is a carefully cultivated balance of experiences in weaving together these three areas. Her focus will be on creating supports to enable faculty to achieve synergies in their teaching, research, and community engagement.

### A COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS

Building on the remarkable success of the School's MSW and Ph.D. programs, Denby-Brinson has set her sights on catalyzing transformational change by focusing on the students and their preparation. She believes that the School must develop future-ready social workers. This starts by attracting the best and diverse students, with the goal of propelling them to become community and national leaders, and by rejecting the false dichotomy of excellence versus access and inclusion.

According to Denby-Brinson, a future-ready social worker competently transitions into varied professional roles, no matter the system or practice

**"Social work is critical to advancing every aspect of society."**

— Ramona Denby-Brinson

level (micro, mezzo, or macro), and is prepared for professional social work practice under tenuous future circumstances. Future-ready practitioners are produced by examining our implicit and explicit curriculum, training, and readiness activities.

Having recently played a leadership role in the university-wide November Mental Health Summit convened by UNC-Chapel Hill Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz, Denby-Brinson routinely engages colleagues in conversations about the need to focus on the "whole student" (addressing the students' academic, wellness, and mental health needs).

She also shares her passion for continuously seeking the best means for enhancing graduate education that will enable students to engage in transformative self-assessment, think critically, and advocate for justice. Here's one of the popular challenge questions she poses to her teams: *How do we teach our students to address systems of oppression and embrace antiracist practice where diversity and inclusion are their professional ethos?*

### A TALENT FOR COLLABORATION

Denby-Brinson is already earning a reputation for collaboration at the School. She is a calm and caring presence who ensures that everyone at

the table has a voice and a vote.

"Working with stakeholders is the fun part!" she says.

She's also effective. In her most recent role, Denby-Brinson served as associate dean for academic affairs, graduate studies chair, and professor at OSU's College of Social Work. Under her leadership, undergraduate and graduate social work programs there experienced a 14% increase in enrollment, with a 22% increase among underrepresented minority and first-generation social work students. MSW applications grew by 40%.

It's no surprise that the social work profession appeals to so many people — "Social work is critical to advancing every aspect of society," Denby-Brinson says, adding that collaboration is essential to achieve results within the profession.

She is most proud of her work with the Lincy Institute, an initiative at UNLV that examines how social services are provided to the most vulnerable children and their families, especially those in the child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems. The initiative has tackled societal challenges including mental health, teen pregnancy prevention, the opioid epidemic, and foster care.

Denby-Brinson served as founding director of the Social Service Research Sector, one of four sectors within the Lincy Institute. She notes that, as director, forging relationships was her top priority: "I'm real comfortable in that space."

Among her accomplishments was the creation of a 12-member community advisory board with partners from health, education, social science, technology, philanthropy, government, and industry. She led the board in coordinating university and community efforts to build needed programs, policies, and research infrastructures to address the needs of vulnerable populations.

Denby-Brinson also developed a coalition of university leaders and more than 70 community affiliates in Clark County, Nev., to expand the workforce for mental and behavioral health and integrated healthcare. The coalition created training programs, established interdisciplinary clinical internships, and built team-teaching partnerships.

### STARTING AT HOME

Denby-Brinson is keenly aware that individuals, families, and communities are at their best in environments that are nurturing, affirming, healthy, psychologically safe, fair, equitable, collaborative, and growth-producing. During her first 100 days at the School, she spent hours convening her teams to openly and honestly discuss and set in motion plans to enhance organizational strength by investing in the School's best resource: its people.

Rather than immediately commissioning a strategic planning process, Denby-Brinson is instead challenging the School's leadership teams, special committees, and advisory groups to focus on action plans that lead to ensuring wellness, cultivating positive culture and climate, creating faculty and staff professional growth and career development plans, and producing staff-centered future-of-work models.

She hopes that by attending to health and well-being as a School, we model for our students the importance of this, and we position ourselves to be strong for the important work required of social work educators and researchers.

**"The future requires our profession to lead boldly, collectively, and without compromise."**

— Ramona Denby-Brinson

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Denby-Brinson expects to bring her collaborative spirit into every aspect of the School, from admissions to community-building to research.

"The future requires our profession to lead boldly, collectively, and without compromise," she explains, adding that UNC School of Social Work will continue to lead nationally and globally.

"This is the best place to effect change," she said. "Who's with me?" ■





# Students' hopes for a changing profession

Compiled by Susan White



**AMANDA B. ALSTON, 12-MONTH  
ADVANCED STANDING MSW PROGRAM**

Over the next 100 years, I hope that practitioners in the social work profession become more involved in the political arena and serve as elected officials. Micro and macro social work practitioners are at the forefront of understanding social issues and advocating for individuals, groups, and communities. Social work is the profession best suited to reimagine policy solutions and create laws that improve the human condition and address institutionalized discrimination and injustices within our society, which will ultimately restore human rights and repair communities.

**YURIDIANA ALSTON, 3-YEAR CHAPEL  
HILL MSW PROGRAM**

In the next 100 years, I hope to see the social work profession funded to meet client and community needs. I hope that the profession will change, and power will be shifted to the communities that we serve. Dreaming big, social workers would be serving in political roles and providing communities with the resources and tools needed for every person to have a healthy and stable life.

**JEREMY FINAZZO, 2-YEAR FULL-TIME  
MSW PROGRAM**

For clinical social workers in behavioral healthcare settings, I hope the profession will see an increase in demand for practitioners who can serve specific populations of in-patient and outpatient clients. I especially hope there will be an increased demand for social workers who serve geriatric, LGBTQ, substance users, or any combination of these communities, especially as the needs of these populations increase as they age.

**ROEI SHAUL HILLEL, 2-YEAR FULL-TIME  
MSW PROGRAM**

I'd like to see social work become more professionalized and integrated with psychodynamic psychotherapy. I think social work has the potential to lead revolutionary ideas in the world of psychodynamic psychotherapy with its social justice awareness. And I think that the profession should go in that direction rather than concentrate mostly on evidence-based interventions.

**EDITH GALVAN LOPEZ, 12-MONTH  
ADVANCED STANDING MSW PROGRAM**

I hope the field of social work continues to grow in diversity. Our field largely does not reflect the makeup of our client population, and I do believe that as we become more diverse, not only could we serve our clients better, but it could widen the door to more innovative and cultural humility interventions.

**RACHEL MAGUIRE, 2-YEAR FULL-TIME  
MSW PROGRAM**

In my ideal world, in 100 years, social workers will become a thing of the past because everyone will be so supported in their work, home, and personal lives that the need for social workers to connect people with resources is simply nonexistent. While I do not think that is possible, I deeply hope that social workers in the future are funded ten times over and have a plethora of resources at their fingertips to help every person with every need.

**FANI MWASITI, 2-YEAR FULL-TIME  
MSW PROGRAM**

In the next 100 years of the social work profession, it would be incredible to see an increase in integrated behavioral

health practice to enhance well-being for all patients/clients. Additionally, I would like to see more Black people, more races, and people from a greater variety of backgrounds holding higher positions in different fields of social work.

**MACKENZIE PHILLIPS, 12-MONTH  
ADVANCED STANDING MSW PROGRAM**

I hope that within the next 100 years, the social work profession will gain more respect within interdisciplinary environments. I believe this is a realistic possibility through education, advocacy, and continued ethical work by those who are already a part of this wonderful profession.

**DARNISHA PULLEY, 2-YEAR FULL-TIME  
MSW PROGRAM**

Over the next 100 years, I hope to see the social work profession at the forefront of decision-making processes, especially for social determinants of health. I hope to see more social work practitioners in political office or on advisory boards ensuring that equity is centered.

**ALLISON STERSIC, 20-MONTH  
ADVANCED STANDING MSW PROGRAM**

Over the next 100 years I hope the social work profession will experience a reduced need for our profession. I hope we will see a society that values people's well-being over profits and GDP. And I hope we see a society that provides free access to health care, mental health care, and wages that enable all people to live dignified lives and pursue their passions and dreams.



# School faculty are leading the future of social work research

By Susan White

Over three decades, UNC School of Social Work faculty have conducted research that has been vital to improving policies and practice and strengthening the well-being of individuals, families and communities through evidence-based research. But what about the future of social work scholarship? How are today's researchers using new discoveries to advance knowledge and solutions that address some of the most pressing social problems of our time?

For faculty members Gina Chowa, Emily Putnam-Hornstein, and Trenette Clark Goings, the future of social work will involve more global innovation, further examination and use of big data, and research and practices that center racial equity and racial justice. These researchers are innovators of systems and social change.

## GLOBAL IMPACT

For all the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic created over the last two years, including limiting the ability of her research team to travel, Gina Chowa, Johnson-Howard-Adair Distinguished Professor, has never been more optimistic about the direction of her research and its growing impact in the international arena.

"What excites me about the future is not only the knowledge that is being produced but that our research outcomes have the potential to guide policy and program development and to strengthen the delivery of services to the marginalized and vulnerable populations we work with," said Chowa, founding director of Global Social Development Innovations (GSDI), a research center within the School that works to improve the lives of marginalized populations around the world.

Chowa, who came to Carolina in 2008, is considered a pioneer in global intervention research, largely due to her groundbreaking work on the effects of asset ownership on youth and families in resource-limited countries.

**"What excites me about the future is not only the knowledge that is being produced but that our research outcomes have the potential to guide policy and program development and to strengthen the delivery of services to the marginalized and vulnerable populations we work with."**

— *Gina Chowa, Johnson-Howard-Adair Distinguished Professor*

Most of her attention is focused on helping youth and their families gain economic security and stability, including through the development of holistic and impactful interventions that address youth unemployment

and financial exclusion. This work largely targets youth in Sub-Saharan Africa where tens of millions of young people are unemployed. Their barriers to work are complex and can depend largely on access to employment resources, gender, youth skillset, whether youth live in a major metro or rural area, a family's ability to afford a post-secondary education, and an individual's social networks, Chowa said.

"Employment is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires an equally multilevel approach," she explained. "My work focuses on fostering gainful employment for young people through a workforce development lens. We believe that in order for employment to be a tool for economic security and a pathway out of poverty, workforce development programs must be available and accessible to those in great need, including poor and low-skilled youth."

At the same time, these programs must cater to the needs of the workforce and ensure that youth are trained with the skills that industries and entrepreneurs require, Chowa said. Over the last few years, through current partnerships with community agencies, nongovernment and development organizations, Chowa has helped to develop workforce training programs that provide youth with life, work readiness, entrepreneurial, and technical skills, as well as support services, including job counseling and workplace experience.

Strengthening a family's economic security is also connected to their ability to save money.

In recent years, Chowa's research and that of her GSDI team has also focused heavily on financial inclusion and ensuring that hard-to-reach populations, including those with limited incomes, have access to affordable and user-friendly banking services and other financial products.

As the School's associate dean for global engagement, Chowa is equally optimistic about the future of preparing social work students for global practice and rigorous research. She's encouraged, in part, because of the growing number of

international students enrolling at Carolina — nearly 2,200 for the 2022 academic year, an all-time high. Perhaps just as important, more are increasingly aware of our connections as global citizens and recognize that present-day societal challenges and solutions transcend borders, Chowa added.

"Students are interested in seeing how the pandemic has impacted marginalized populations across the world and what solutions we can develop to address the needs," she said. "Students seem more aware of academic or student global collaborations that would have been impossible before but are now commonplace. Students, I believe, have become more engaged global citizens than before and are eager to engage."

## TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS

Emily Putnam-Hornstein, who joined the School's faculty in 2020, has built her career around the analysis of public agency data. Such work is well-suited for a profession committed to social, political, and economic change.

"Our School's mission includes transforming systems to improve lives and advance equity. In my mind, there is no better way to drive system improvements than by studying how they currently operate, and the outcomes they produce through examinations of the data they collect," said Putnam-Hornstein, John A. Tate Distinguished Professor for Children in Need.

For her scholarship, Putnam-Hornstein uses information gathered by public welfare agencies, including details from child maltreatment reports and findings, to study which children are at a higher risk for future abuse or neglect and which families have more complex service needs. This process involves the use of "machine learning" to develop



Gina Chowa, Ph.D.

Emily Putnam-Hornstein, Ph.D.



predictive risk models that will search for important patterns in data that humans can often miss. Predictive risk modeling is at the heart of Putnam-Hornstein's collaborative work with Rhema Vaithianathan, a professor and health economist at the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand.

### **"We're trying to bring science to the risk assessment process through better methods, data, and technology."**

— **Emily Putnam-Hornstein, John A. Tate Distinguished Professor for Children in Need**

Together, the researchers are working to help agencies better protect children from maltreatment by helping them to identify early those families who may need additional resources and support.

"We ask our child protection system to consider both immediate safety concerns and a child's future risk of harm," Putnam-Hornstein explained. "But risk assessment tools currently used by frontline staff have very little predictive accuracy, are time-consuming to complete, and can be very subjective."

However, algorithms can help structure information and data to present a more consistent picture of risk and needs, she added. "We're trying to bring science to the risk assessment process through better methods, data, and technology."

When child welfare caseworkers receive a call about potential abuse or neglect, there is a brief window to determine if the worker should launch a formal investigation, dismiss the report, or refer the family for community services. These decisions can be based on a review of previous case files, family

demographics and history, including a family's interaction with the court. However, because agencies collect data differently and given the complexity of the information they may need to consider or have immediate access to, the decision to intervene is often imperfect, Putnam-Hornstein said.

What is clear is that historically, more than one-third of children in the United States are subject to an investigation for child abuse or neglect at some point during childhood. Additionally, Black families and children continue to be overrepresented in maltreatment investigations and foster care systems. There is little doubt that change and reform is needed, Putnam-Hornstein said.

"I think that one-third number reflects that our system has grown into something that it was never really designed to be," she added. "We are flooding the system with calls that must be screened as only some should be investigated, but we have failed to equip social workers with the tools needed to do that work."

Still, some groups have been reluctant to view predictive risk modeling as a solution to a more equitable system. These skeptics worry about the potential of a computer algorithm using agency data to perpetuate stereotypes and disparities — that the model will be used to predict, for example, who enters foster care.

Some of these concerns have focused on a screening tool that Putnam-Hornstein and Vaithianathan co-designed for Allegheny County, Pa.

The tool, which has been in use since 2016, was created to help

strengthen the process for screening maltreatment reports received through the agency's hotline. An independent evaluation from Stanford University has shown that the screening tool has helped workers better identify high risk cases and refer families with a lower risk of

maltreatment to community services.

Putnam-Hornstein and Vaithianathan see opportunities for using algorithms to improve the consistency of decisions and reduce human errors. The researchers are currently working on a pilot project in Los Angeles, Calif., where among other efforts, they are using a predictive risk model to better understand why some Black families were screened in for an investigation despite a low overall risk.

That predictive risk modeling could be used to prevent child maltreatment or potentially to advance racial equity suggests that the use of algorithms shouldn't be judged as inherently bad or good, Putnam-Hornstein added. This approach just needs to be further evaluated to ensure that big data is used ethically to address social challenges and inform policy.

"This is why we need social work practitioners at the table to help think through how these tools can be built and implemented to support better practice," she said.

### **THE ROOT OF DISPARITIES**

As a young child growing up in rural northeastern North Carolina, Trenette Clark Goings saw first-hand the consequences of substance misuse within her community. She also saw how Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) with limited incomes struggled with access to health care, not only because the nearest hospital was a half hour away but because they lacked insurance and reliable transportation.

Although Goings may not have understood at the time that these challenges were connected to the overall well-being of her neighbors, she did recognize one truth: that health varies considerably by race and ethnicity.

"I noticed these disparities and inequities and was really curious about why they existed," said Goings, Sandra Reeves Spears and John B. Turner Distinguished Professor.

Today, Goings' research focuses on racial and ethnic health disparities with a primary emphasis on the epidemiology, etiology, and prevention of substance use and other high-risk behaviors among youth and emerging adults of color, particularly African

### **"Anti-Black racism, alone, costs the U.S. \$16 trillion per year. In this way, inequities impact all of us financially."**

— **Trenette Clark Goings, Sandra Reeves Spears and John B. Turner Distinguished Professor**

American and biracial individuals. Goings is especially interested in how poor environmental conditions, such as lack of access to healthy foods and transportation and unsafe neighborhoods, affect the overall health and well-being of BIPOC communities.

But she's also interested in the why. Why is it that communities of color face these challenges more often than white communities? In what ways do policies, many of which are rooted in structural racism, continue to harm already vulnerable individuals and families? Although historically, there has been limited research in this area, interest is growing, partly due to the increasing focus across the nation on eliminating racial discrimination and inequities.



Goings examines these issues because ultimately, such injustices affect everyone, she said.

"We are interconnected," she said. "Anti-Black racism, alone, costs the

U.S. \$16 trillion per year. In this way, inequities impact all of us financially. Also, racism begets racism. Racist policies eventually negatively impact all BIPOC, which leads to a greater number of people who are susceptible to racism and its negative impact, which includes stifled careers, inequities in income and net worth, criminal justice involvement, substance misuse, illnesses, and death."

For nearly 15 years, Goings and her research team have used federal grants to address these problems. Specifically, they have developed studies with a focus on substance use among biracial adolescents and emerging adults and how the challenges these youth often face in navigating multiple racial and ethnic worlds is connected to their use of alcohol and other drugs. Most recently, Goings has been exploring the "threatening" narrative of Black men and youth to see if the research bears out the typical stereotype: that youth of color are more likely to be involved in risky behaviors such as school fights, substance

use, and delinquency. In fact, Goings and her co-authors have found just the opposite.

Using advanced statistical analysis of three years of data from a federally funded and expansive nationally representative survey of adolescent youth on drug use and health, the researchers found that the majority of Black youth (74%) are not involved in risky behaviors, including serious fights with the intention to do harm, stealing, selling drugs, and carrying handguns. Of the small percentage connected to such behaviors, the study found that Black youth mostly engaged in serious fights only and were more likely to live in high-risk communities, where they were vulnerable to racism and discrimination. With these findings, Goings sees hope in breaking society's stereotype of Black youth as deviant



and dangerous.

"Such hasty generalizations are harmful to Black kids," she said. "If we continue to misrepresent Black youth with these generalizations, we are essentially limiting kids' potential and ultimately impacting their life trajectories. We place them in harm's way via the school-to-

prison pipeline, and we subject them to potential harm by police officers and others and risk their overall well-being and mental health."

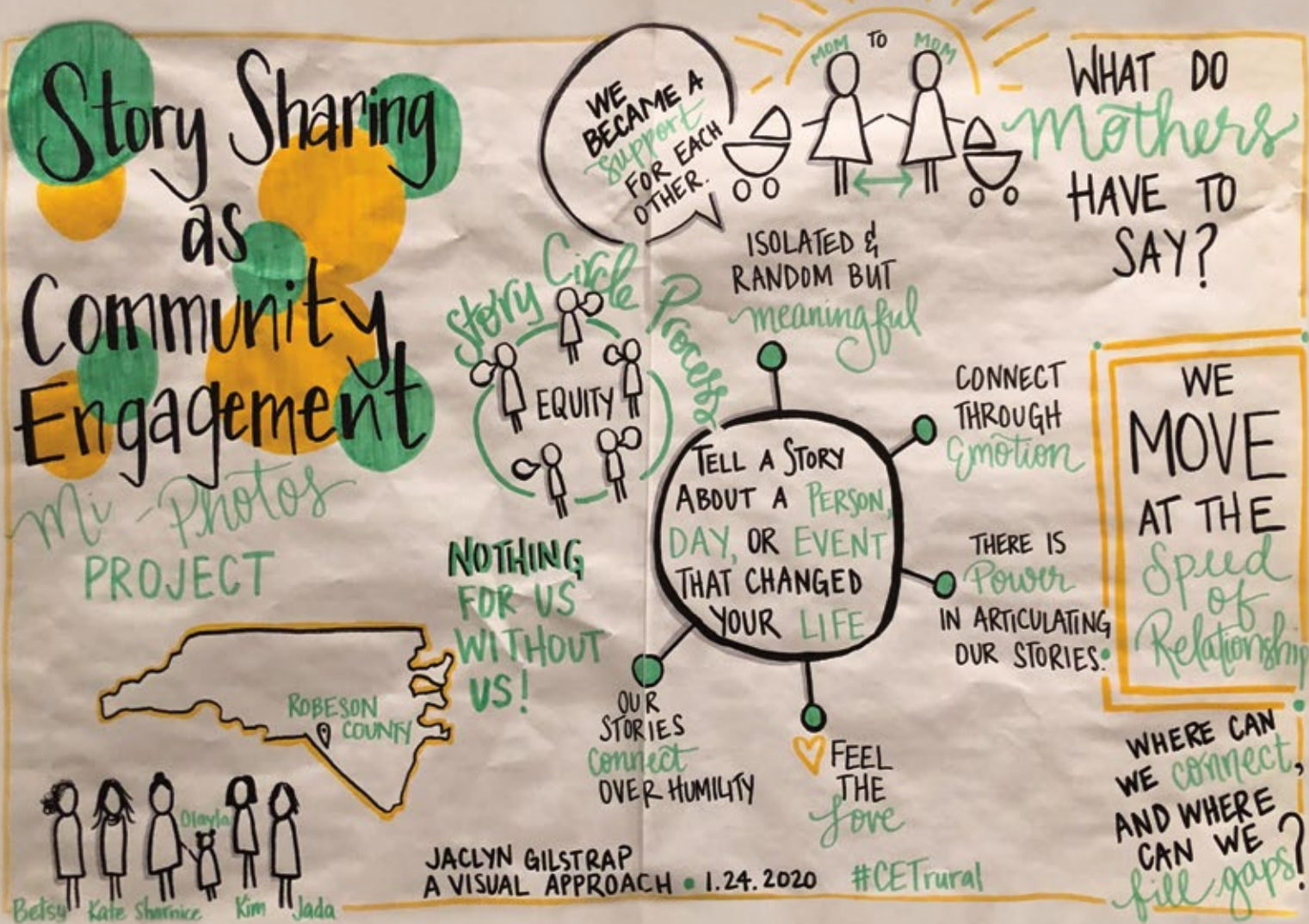
Future social work researchers and practitioners have a moral and ethical responsibility to challenge society's historical assumptions about Black men and youth, she said.

"We must destigmatize Black youth, and we must normalize the belief that Black youth are just that — youth," Goings said. "In fact, per the NASW code of ethics, future social work researchers, practitioners, and educators have a responsibility to be antiracist — in public and in private, when popular and unpopular.

"I am hopeful that future social work researchers will lead in research with their antiracist, intersectional, economical, and ecological systems lenses while using the most rigorous research methods to improve the lives of all and especially, marginalized and vulnerable communities." ■

*Trenette Clark Goings, Ph.D.*





# Resilience in Robeson

By Karen Kornegay

At a playground near Lumberton, N.C., a young woman studied the well-used equipment — standard-issue swings and climbing structures. She raised a camera to her eye, framed the image, and snapped a photograph.

For anyone else, this is simply a photograph of a playground. But for this woman, the photograph is a reminder that her community doesn't have enough resources to enrich the life of her child, who has a disability and cannot use those recreational facilities safely.

## CAMERA AS RESEARCH TOOL

The photograph also became a data point and a focus for discussion in MI-PHOTOS (Mothers Informing Pregnancy and post-partum Health Outcomes Through Story Sharing), a participatory research project led by Sarah E. “Betsy” Bledsoe, Ph.D., an associate professor at

UNC School of Social Work; Katherine LeMasters, a Ph.D. candidate at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health epidemiology department, and the MI-PHOTOS Community Advisory Board.

Eight mothers in Robeson County became co-researchers as part of the MI-PHOTOS project. It's a community-engaged participatory approach to research, said Bledsoe. MI-PHOTOS established the mothers as project stakeholders and essential members of the research team. Many of these mothers now serve as members of Community Voices, the next phase of the project's Community Advisory Board (CAB).

Joining the mothers were other research team and CAB members from Robeson County and from UNC-Chapel Hill: Brittany Gordon, Erica Little, Janice Oxendine, and Dolores Vasquez (Robeson County Healthy Start); Melissa Sampson (Robeson County Health Department); Darlene Gold

and Stephanie Chavis (Nurse-Family Partnership); Kim Pevia (community activism); Jada Brooks, Ph.D. (UNC School of Nursing); Alexandra E. Lightfoot, Ed.D. (UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health); Ann Schindler, Leah Daniel, Elizabeth Godown, Kiva Jordan, and Brooke Lombardi (graduate research assistants); Bledsoe; and LeMasters.

Together, they designed research to address the question, “What is needed to improve health and well-being for mothers in Robeson County?” They conducted a needs assessment in the early stages of the project.

Over the next year, the mothers used digital cameras and a methodology called PhotoVoice to respond to assignments that asked them to interpret their thoughts and feelings about their families, their communities, and their well-being through photographs and stories. “Where do mothers get stress and support in this

community?” was the question for one assignment; they responded to five different questions over the next six months.

At each PhotoVoice meeting, mothers viewed the photographs and told their stories, choosing one photograph for a more in-depth group discussion. Over the course of the MI-PHOTOS project, a clear picture emerged of some needs in Robeson County: enhanced access to health care (including mental health support), transportation, programs for children, peer-based support programs, resources for families with children who have disabilities — a list that mirrors the needs of many rural, lower-income counties in North Carolina.

In February 2021, the MI-PHOTOS mothers shared their photos and their ideas during an open forum for community leaders in Robeson County. CAB decided to present the forum as an online presentation to prevent any additional delays, as the forum had been originally scheduled for May 2020 but was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions on in-person events.

“We’ve got some very dedicated moms who’ve been really active in

**“You’ve got to be an advocate for your family and for yourself.”**

— Janice Oxendine

this project,” Bledsoe said. “This is their work, too.”

## KEY FINDINGS

Three themes emerged during the project, Bledsoe said.

First, the mothers needed — and wanted — peer support, including a formal space where they could come together to share information about community resources and their own experiences.

“They turned the project into an informal social support group,” Bledsoe said. “They had a lot to offer. They’re very resourceful.”

Second, some women needed direct support in the form of confidential, individual, therapeutic services.

“The programs that are there now are really helpful to these moms, but there’s a real gap when they age out,” Bledsoe said. For example, services from Healthy Start, the federal government’s signature program to prevent infant mortality, end when the child is 18 months old.

Third, policies and services that support families are vital to the well-being of children and their parents. This can include accessible health and child care and family leave, Bledsoe said.

The project also revealed a common characteristic: These mothers living in rural lower-income communities have existing strengths that enable them to face daily challenges with determination.

“What stands out to me is the resilience of these moms, the generosity of spirit they had — they really come together to support one another with knowledge, time, whatever,” Bledsoe said. “They want a safe and healthy place for their children to grow as well as themselves.”



Sarah E. “Betsy” Bledsoe, Ph.D.

Katherine LeMasters



## PEER SUPPORT FOR MOTHERS

The need for peer support is echoed by Sharnice Marshall, one of the Robeson County mothers who served on the MI-PHOTOS Community Advisory Board.

“[There are things] you can’t tell your parents, but you could tell other moms who are going through what you’re going through,” Marshall said. “It helped me more than I expected.”

Many of the young mothers share the same struggles, from managing a household with young children to finding transportation for work, school, and appointments.

For example, Marshall said, “Every day, I hang [loads of laundry] up around the house.” She has a toddler and a newborn, with a washer but no dryer.

When her first child was born, Marshall lived in Fairmont, about 10 miles south of Lumberton, where many county agencies and health care services are based. There weren’t many options for public transportation. Robeson County offers SEATS (South East Area Transit System), a daytime transit service, for \$2 per passenger with advance reservations required. The Healthy Start program provided transportation to medical appointments, but that service was halted by COVID-19 restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected Marshall’s ability to meet with other mothers during CAB meetings, too. She missed the interaction: “I would really love to see everyone face-to-face.”

**“It’s a safe space where you can come together with peers and be open and honest.”**

— **Brittany Gordon**

## ADVOCACY AND TOGETHERNESS

As a health educator with Healthy Start, Janice Oxendine helps connect parents with services they may need — vocational rehabilitation, housing resources, legal services, and more. She has a special interest in families with children who have disabilities, helping them identify the services they may need and develop plans for their children to continue through school.

Oxendine described the MI-PHOTOS project as an opportunity for participating mothers to become effective advocates for themselves and their families. She said she was surprised by some descriptions the mothers shared about why the

photographs were important to them. However, as they explained why they took those photographs, the mothers practiced advocating their ideas.

“You’ve got to be an advocate for your family and for yourself,” Oxendine said. “It’s a good thing to not be afraid to ask questions — don’t be afraid to investigate a day care center before you take a child there.”

Brittany Gordon, a case manager with Healthy Start, has lived in Robeson County her entire life. Still, she was surprised by what she learned as the mothers shared their photographs and stories.

“The project was eye-opening,” Gordon said. “We’re in this [as social workers] every day, but [it’s different] when you see something from someone else’s perspective.”

Gordon added that she was impressed by the way the mothers interacted.

“One of the things I observed was the togetherness they had when they are together,” Gordon said. “It was a relief for them. It’s a safe space when you can come together with peers and be open and honest.”

“I pray for us to be more resilient, but I don’t want the resiliency to cover up the trauma,” she added.

## COMMITTING TO ROBESON

Since 2012, Bledsoe has been building relationships in Robeson County with colleagues including Jada Brooks, with whom she re-connected at a Healthy Start conference. Community leaders in Robeson County had become skeptical of researchers who came there, collected data, and left without having any real impact on the county’s challenges. Bledsoe was determined to create a different legacy for this research.

**“I see this as a community I hope to be partnered with for the rest of my career.”**

— **Sarah E. “Betsy” Bledsoe**

LeMasters and Bledsoe began working together in 2017. With the guidance of Brooks, Pevia, and others in and from Robeson County, they began to build what they hope will be lasting and equitable partnerships.

“If you’re going to come work in this county, you need to be committed,” Bledsoe said. “I started these relationships about 10 years ago — I see this as a community I hope to be partnered with for the rest of my career.”

Robeson County is one of the largest counties in North Carolina, with dedicated service providers, spiritual communities, and strong ties among residents. This rural county is also one of the most racially diverse counties in the South, with its population divided almost equally between American Indian, Black, and white residents. The Latino population is slowly growing, and the county’s demographics are beginning to shift to reflect that.

In addition to its strengths, Robeson County has challenges, with many linked to rurality, families surviving low incomes, and historical trauma. This includes one of the highest infant mortality rates in the state and highly prevalent adverse birth outcomes. For example, 11.5% of the children born in Robeson County have low birth weights, compared to 8.9% across North Carolina.

Families faced new challenges when Robeson County experienced severe flooding during Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and, before the county had fully recovered, during Hurricane Florence in 2018. Three years later, some families are still living in homes that were damaged and have not yet been repaired. Some businesses have closed, leaving vacant buildings and limited employment prospects.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community partnerships are a key to recovery and require high levels of dedication.

That’s the approach Robeson Health Care Corporation (RHCC) and Healthy Start CORPS have taken to reduce infant mortality and help families to become healthier. RHCC was founded in 1985 to provide a range of health care services to Robeson County residents. Healthy Start CORPS has been an initiative of the University of North Carolina Pembroke for nearly two decades, focusing on perinatal health.

In 2014, each organization received \$500,000 separately in funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Maternal and Child Health Bureau. They decided to join forces as Robeson Healthy Start. Together, they provide services to mothers and fathers with children up to 18 months in age. Those services include counseling, case management, breast feeding education, fatherhood programs, classes to discourage substance use, and referrals to other family-related resources.

Other partnerships have addressed more immediate needs, such as the lack of accessible playgrounds for children

with disabilities. In July 2021, beverage company Talking Rain announced plans to build a new playground designed for accessibility and sensory needs, in partnership with City of Lumberton Parks & Recreation. It replaces a flood-damaged play area in a community park near Campbell Street.

Twenty-five miles west of Lumberton, Maxton has its own accessible playground, built in 2015 as a community partnership between Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, and national nonprofit KaBOOM!

In these communities, the day-to-day needs of young mothers and their families go far beyond playgrounds, but every new partnership provides hope and opportunity.

## WHAT’S NEXT FOR MI-PHOTOS?

In 2020, the MI-PHOTOS project received UNC-Chapel Hill’s Public Service Award for Engaged Scholarship. Bledsoe emphasized that, just as the research is participatory, the award is participatory, too. CAB members received certificates and gift cards in recognition of the award.

Additional funding from UNC School of Social Work, the Thorp Faculty Engaged Scholars Program, and the Carolina Women’s Center will contribute toward future partnership activities, Bledsoe said. “It’s about bringing resources to the community,” she said. The funds will help support interviews and additional data collection as part of the Community Voices project, as well as developing interventions (such as support groups) to address the needs identified in MI-PHOTOS. ■

## How can we continue this work?





# Faculty, staff, and student NEWS AND AWARDS

**Associate professor David Ansong** was appointed by Governor Roy Cooper to serve on North Carolina's Permanency Innovation Initiative Oversight Committee. Created in 2013, the committee is charged with developing initiatives for foster care youth transitioning to adulthood in North Carolina.

**Professor Gina Chowa** received the Leadership in Social Development Award during the Virtual International Consortium for Development (ICSD) 22nd Biennial Conference. The award recognizes her efforts to advance the field of global social development.

**Annamae Giles** was promoted to clinical assistant professor. Giles, who has been with the School's 3-Year MSW Winston-Salem Program since 2014, has spent her career in both macro and direct practice in the areas of healthcare, end of life, substance use prevention, and aging.

**Rachel W. Goode** was reappointed as assistant professor. Goode's research interests include developing, implementing, and evaluating interventions to address racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in obesity and eating disorders. Goode was also recently selected for the Thorp Faculty Engaged Scholars Program.

**Teresa Kidd**, an accounting tech for UNC School of Social Work since 2008, retired in September. Previously, Kidd worked with UNC School of Medicine.

Research assistant professor **Brianna M. Lombardi** was recently named deputy director for the Carolina Health Workforce Research Center at the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research. Lombardi, Ph.D. '18, also holds an appointment as an assistant professor with UNC Family Medicine.

Adjunct faculty member **Allison De Marco** was invited to serve a two-year appointment as a faculty affiliate with the UNC Program for Public Discourse.

Ph.D. student **Claire McNellan** was awarded a one-year \$20,000 grant from the Center for Innovation in Child Maltreatment Policy, Research and Training at Washington University for the study "Assessing the utility of a risk-stratification model to increase equitable service connection." Professor **Emily Putnam-Hornstein** is co-principal investigator on the project. The proposal was one of three projects to receive a pilot grant.

**Cindy Fraga Rizo** was named the John A. Tate Early Career Scholar for Children in Need and promoted to associate professor. The Tate professorship recognizes a faculty member's high level of productivity in teaching, publishing, research, and service in support of children, youth, and families as well as overall contributions to the School of Social Work community.

**Robin Sansing** was appointed as UNC School of Social Work's director of wellness. In the newly created position, Sansing reports to the dean and provides vision, direction, and strategic leadership for addressing the School's community wellness. As part of her responsibility, Sansing will work to create and sustain a culture of wellness for students, staff, and faculty by assessing wellness needs, ensuring programming is provided, and measuring wellness outcomes.

**Tauchiana Williams**, director of the School's 12-Month Advanced Standing MSW Program and a field education advisor, was accepted for admission to the 2021 BRIDGES Academic Leadership for Women program. BRIDGES is an inclusive professional development program for women in higher education who seek to gain or strengthen their leadership capabilities. Williams will join 35 women from varied higher education institutions across North Carolina to comprise this year's class.



Vera Tayeh (fourth from left), founder of the Vera Tayeh Innovation and Impact Award, joined School officials to honor the first three recipients of the Tayeh Award. From left are Tanja Jisa, community education coordinator for the School's Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship Lab; award recipient Juliana Wilson; Dean Ramona Denby-Brinson; Tayeh; award recipient Azleena Azhar; and award recipient Naana Ewool.

## Three students receive first Tayeh Awards

By Karen Kornegay

**T**hree Master of Social Work students at UNC School of Social Work have been chosen as the first recipients of the Vera Tayeh Innovation and Impact Award.

Azleena Azhar, Naana Ewool, and Juliana Wilson will each develop a unique field placement around an innovative project with the potential of improving the lives of individuals, families, and communities. The goal? To think big, take risks, and be bold in challenging both oneself and the status quo.

The students will work with faculty, field education supervisors, clients, and community stakeholders to help design interventions that reflect innovation and scholarly discovery in social work. Each will receive a \$10,000 award to support their projects.

### MEET THE RECIPIENTS

Azleena Azhar has more than 15 years of experience in community service and has served Triangle refugees through World Relief Durham and as a chaplain intern for Duke Religious Life. She earned a graduate certificate in Islamic chaplaincy from Hartford Seminary and has continued her clinical pastoral education at Duke Hospital, where she serves on the pastoral services advisory committee. Azhar is the founder of Hope Sisters, a safe and nonjudgmental support group for Muslim women, and is a co-facilitator of SuperMoms, a support group for mothers of children with special needs.

Naana Ewool is a first-generation American-born Ghanaian, a queer Black woman who is committed to Black liberation globally. She is pursuing her MSW with a concentration in Community, Management, and Policy Practice. Ewool is interested in applying social work skills to radical community

work, focusing on community care, healing justice, and creating alternatives to policing through transformative justice.

Juliana Wilson spent 19 years in Indonesia, studying dance and gender with a Fulbright Award and later working on innovative international development programs to build rural infrastructure and improve maternal and child health. In North Carolina, she served at a crisis center for survivors of interpersonal violence and began working in tobacco cessation through her first-year field work as a MSW student.

### ABOUT THE AWARD

The Vera Tayeh Innovation and Impact Award was founded by Vera Tayeh (MSW '87), who remembered her experiences as an intern in Lebanon, where she was born. Tayeh enjoyed both creativity and responsibility in developing afterschool programs for teenagers during her internship, and she wanted current MSW students at the School to have similar opportunities.

Tayeh established the award with a \$100,000 gift to the School to develop incentives for student innovation. A member of the School's advisory board, Tayeh has worked in child welfare with Wake County Human Services for more than 20 years.

Tanya Jisa, community education coordinator for the School's Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Lab, is the School's point of contact for the Tayeh Award and provides assistance to the students in developing their projects. ■

To learn more about the Tayeh Award, visit its web page: [ssw.unc.edu/tayeh-award](https://ssw.unc.edu/tayeh-award)



# Letter from the alumni president



**“Our School has a long-standing tradition of excellence in our field, and I am so proud of that.”**

— *Caitlin Bearden Kappler*

Happy New Year to our UNC School of Social Work alumni —

I have the great honor to serve as the newly elected president of your Alumni Council. Our council, which has a rich history of contributions to SSW, has been most recently led by Kristen Register Lakis. I'm grateful for her leadership and service during what can only be described as a challenging couple of years. Her hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed, and I know I have big shoes to fill!

A little bit about myself — I graduated from UNC School of Social Work's Advanced Standing MSW program in 2014, after earning my bachelor's degree from Auburn University and serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala (2011–2013). One of my favorite things about being a student at UNC (in addition to basketball!) was the opportunity to put my education directly into practice by volunteering with the UNC Refugee Mental Health and Wellness Initiative and with the Student Health Action Coalition (SHAC). These experiences not only prepared me to be a better social worker but also equipped me with skills I use in my current role as a Research Health Science Specialist at the Durham VA Medical Center.

When I think about my time at SSW — the professors who encouraged me, the classmates who shared my passion for social justice, the field supervisors who mentored me — I'm really grateful for all of the support that I received both in the classroom and in the field. The relationships I built were a solid foundation for my career in North Carolina and beyond.

That's one reason that I joined the Alumni Council — to give back to the institution that kickstarted my career. There are many other reasons, including the chance to network with social work colleagues, a way to stay in touch with the School and help influence the future of social work education, and an opportunity to keep my professional skills fresh.

As I think about the future of our School and the alumni council, I can't help but reflect on SSW's 100-year history, which we are celebrating now. Our School has a long-standing tradition of excellence in our field, and I am so proud of that. Many people work to keep SSW at its best, including our alumni who play an integral role in maintaining SSW's standing among the top schools in the country.

Today, it's more important than ever to have a strong Alumni Council supporting the School in every way possible. We advise the administration on educational programs, we help mentor students, we support the School's development activities, and so much more. We need YOU to help with our work, and I invite each of you to join me and take an active role in the Alumni Council.

Here's to our next 100 years!

Caitlin Bearden Kappler, MSW '14

## Alumni news

### 1960s

**Louise Moore Bryan** (MSW '62) died on July 20. She spent much of her career in Raleigh, working as a marriage counselor and volunteering as a Guardian Ad Litem, among other roles in community service.

### 1970s



**MaryAnn Black** (MSW '70) was awarded posthumously the University Medal, Duke University's highest honor for transformational service. Before her death in 2020, Black had served in the N.C. House of Representatives and as associate vice president for community relations with Duke University Health System, among other leadership roles.

**Trinidad “Trinie” Pangelinan** (MSW '75) was recently honored for her golden jubilee, 50 years of service as a Sister of Mercy, serving children, families and needy populations.

### 1980s

**Gary Bailey** (MSW '84) received his Ph.D. in Leadership Studies in May

2021 from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. His dissertation title was “The Association of Emotional Intelligence to Transformational Leadership to Job Satisfaction of Social Work Leaders.”

### 1990s

**Basil Gooden** (Ph.D. '97) was recently named director of state operations for rural development with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Gooden has previously held roles as the chief deputy director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development and as an extension specialist in Community Vitality at Virginia Tech, among other roles.

**Scott Janssen** (MSW '93) was recently interviewed for the End of Life University podcast about near death experiences and after death communication in hospice work. Janssen has been a hospice clinical worker for almost 30 years. Janssen was also quoted in the CNN article, “They lost their loved ones to Covid. Then they heard from them again.”

**Susan McCann** (MSW '91) was named chief operating officer for Samaritan, a nonprofit healthcare provider offering hospice, grief support and palliative care in Evesham, N.J. McCann has been with the agency for nearly 20 years and previously held positions with the Central North Carolina Chapter of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Philadelphia Corporation for Aging and the AIDS Coalition of Southern New Jersey.

### 2000s

**Erin Barger** (MSW '09) was named CEO of the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia.

**Ryan Estes** (MSW '09) was recently elected treasurer of the Board of Directors for the National Association of Social Workers. Estes is the treatment operations director of Coastal Horizons Center, Inc. in Wilmington, N.C.

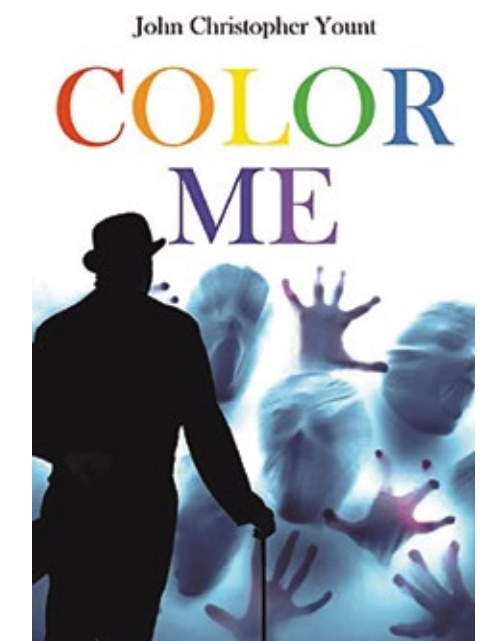
**Angela Oxendine Kahn** (MSW '03) received the Civilian of the Year Award for 2020 from the Fort Bragg Soldier Recovery Unit at Fort Bragg, N.C. She also recently received a Military Coin for

## Alumni, do you have news to share?

Email updates to [unc.ssw.communications@unc.edu](mailto:unc.ssw.communications@unc.edu) for use in Contact or the School's monthly newsletter.

Civilian Service from Brigadier General Paula C. Lodi.

**Sophia Kustas Smith** (MSW '01, PhD '07) was awarded tenure by Duke University. She is an associate professor at Duke School of Nursing, with research in oncology social work, survivorship, cancer care, and behavioral health interventions.



**Chris Yount** (MSW '04) published his first book, *Color Me*. The drama tells the story of Johnathan Black, a painter who suffers from schizophrenia, and his triumph over mental illness. Yount's second publication, *The Survivor Trilogy*, inspired by his time working with burn survivors at the N.C. Jaycee Burn Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, will be out in 2022.





**Mia Ives-Rublee** (MSW '09), (lower left) director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C., recently joined other leaders to meet with Vice President Kamala Harris to discuss issues and policies related to disabilities, race and the LGBTQ community.

## 2010s

**Sarah Dababnah** (MSW '10, Ph.D. '14) recently earned a prestigious Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award and will travel to Egypt to study disparities among people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are often treated differently from others. Dababnah is an associate professor at

the University of Maryland School of Social Work.

**Benjamin Rosado** (MSW/MPH '18) is a senior training manager at the Boston Public Health Commission in Boston, Mass.

**Tricia Smar** (MSW '10) gave birth to her first child, Eliana, with her husband Brent Darden on July 2, 2021. She

and Brent wed in a small backyard ceremony last year after COVID forced them to cancel their large ceremony.

**Aaron M. Thompson** (Ph.D. '12) was promoted to professor and director at University of Missouri-Columbia School of Social Work.



**Rayhaan Adams** (MSW '13) was recently named director of Population Health Clinical Services for UNC Faculty Physicians within UNC Family Medicine. Previously, he served as case manager and as senior lead for Population Health Clinical Services. His new role will include guiding development of related services in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics.



**Yaliza Ramos** (MSW '14) was named director of the UNC Campus Y. Previously, Ramos served as interim director for 18 months.



**Nora Spencer** (MSW '17) was named one of Triangle United Way's "10 to Watch" leaders of diverse nonprofits.



# Seaside reflections on the deanship

By Gary Bowen, Ph.D.  
Kenan Distinguished Professor



**A**hoy! Since stepping down as dean of UNC School of Social Work on Aug. 15, 2021, I have spent time at Emerald Isle, N.C., preparing for my return to the faculty in spring 2022. Officially, after having my work plan approved by Chancellor Guskiewicz and Provost Blouin, I went on sabbatical for a retreat semester. I have greatly appreciated having time to prepare for teaching in the spring and to re-initiate my research program.

Let me say how pleased I am with the selection of Dr. Ramona Denby-Brinson to assume the deanship. I greatly enjoyed working with her in the first half of August to facilitate a smooth transition, and we have remained in contact. Having such an experienced and capable successor has eased my transition from the deanship. The School is in very competent hands, and its future is bright.

## WHAT DO “FISHING” AND “BEING DEAN” HAVE IN COMMON?

So, what’s up with the “Ahoy”? Those who know me well also know that I love the ocean and fishing — passions I inherited from my father. Working from the beach has given me the opportunity to do more fishing than typically possible, especially in the fall (the best time to catch fish). While pursuing these passions, I’ve enjoyed

wearing my sea captain’s cap (you’ll see it in the photo) that Dana Caudill gave me as a parting gift.

In this context, I was recently asked how being dean and fishing are similar. At first, I just laughed at the comparison, but the more I reflected on the question, the more parallels I discovered. As part of my effort to integrate my experiences as dean over the last five years, as well as to have a little fun in responding to the request from the editorial staff of *Contact* to share some “lessons learned” from my deanship, I would like to mention just a few of these similarities.

**“I sought to ... keep the School’s focus on impact, making a difference for individuals, families, and communities.”**

— Gary Bowen

First, although I enjoy fishing, I like *catching* fish better. Fishing is a process, whereas catching is an outcome. Being dean is similar. Although many duties and activities are associated with being dean, I sought to work from an outcome perspective to keep the School’s focus on impact — making a difference for individuals, families, and communities in North Carolina and beyond through teaching, research, and engagement. I referred to this focus as closing the “know-do” gap and, in this context, I frequently mentioned the importance of four R’s: Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Resolve.

Second, both fishing and being dean require a strategy. With fishing, you have to know what you are fishing for — your target determines the fishing strategy, such as the location and the type of rod, lures, and bait. As I look back at my years as dean, one of the School’s greatest accomplishments from my perspective was the

2019–2021 Strategic Plan, which focused on impact and provided an action plan for accountability and success. The mission statement (Advancing Equity, Transforming Systems, Improving Lives) became a rallying cry that informed every aspect of the School.

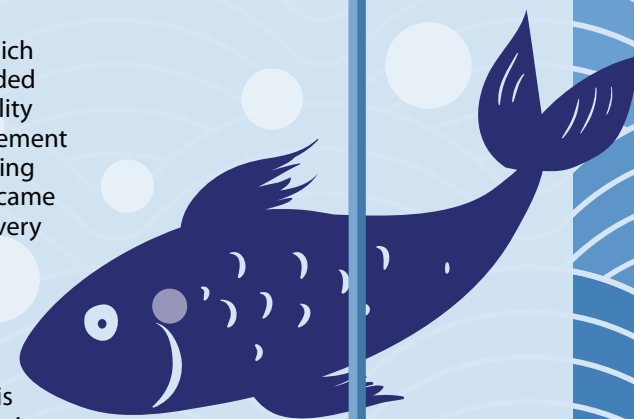
## STAYING AWARE OF THE SITUATION

Third, attention to context is critical in both fishing and serving as dean. Whether you catch fish or not depends on a number of elements out of your control, including wind direction, water temperature, and turbulence, as well as the times and levels of high and low tides. As dean, I had to remain situationally aware at all times, including maintaining awareness of the opportunities and the challenges emerging at the national, state, and university levels, as well as internal dynamics playing out at the School at any particular point. These forces frame and shape priorities at the School level and influence what can and cannot be accomplished at a given time. I was particularly proud of the School’s ability to successfully pivot in March 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic.

Last, both fishing and being dean involve assuming responsibility for those around you. I typically fish from my boat rather than the shore or a pier. Consequently, I am responsible for ensuring the safety of all lives on board, including having life jackets, safety equipment, and a plan of action in case of an emergency or a threatening situation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, “A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor,” and whether the captain of the boat or the dean of the School, the job carries great responsibility for ensuring safe passage through fair weather and storms. As dean, I took my leadership responsibility very seriously to ensure the safety and promote the well-being of faculty, staff, and students. In this context, I am particularly proud of

our establishment of a Wellness Committee in 2019, including the appointment of the first director of wellness in 2021.

I appreciate the opportunity to take a lighter perspective in writing these reflections. Serving as dean of UNC School of Social Work was the greatest honor and privilege of my life. Please know how much I value and appreciate the many contributions of our senior administrative team, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and our incredible Board of Advisors during my time as dean. Thank you. ■







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# SSW navigates COVID-19

By Karen Kornegay

**N**early two years ago, UNC School of Social Work's plans to celebrate its centennial anniversary came to an abrupt halt in March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread further around the world.

School leaders, faculty and staff quickly set aside all other plans, pivoted to online instruction and worked to develop innovative resources to serve social work colleagues in communities throughout the state.

Our alumni reported their own stories of adjustment. Those working in direct practice saw some social problems quickly escalate in scale — eating disorders, substance use, interpersonal violence, gaming addictions, mental health disorders, and more. In response, our researchers designed projects to explore the impact of the pandemic on individuals, families, and communities.

Our continuing education faculty also jumped in to assist the state. In particular, our Family and Children's Resource Program, in partnership with N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, redesigned eight classroom courses for online delivery within just two weeks. These courses — child welfare workforce training required by state legislation — served 1,000 department of social services employees across North Carolina.

Throughout these challenges, we persevered as an academic community. Students and faculty

navigated the new Zoom environment for classes. The School recruited a strong cohort of students for our MSW and Ph.D. programs. And, our researchers published even more articles and celebrated a record-breaking year of funded research.

Since returning to campus in August 2021, our community has faced new challenges, including some instances of quarantine and illness on the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, and increasing reports of mental health concerns.

School leaders again jumped into action with online "town hall" meetings for students, faculty, and staff to share their concerns and ideas for coping with the ongoing pandemic. Professors practiced flexibility to create the best possible learning environment for their students, and our wellness committee provided support through a weekly email, meditation moments, and other activities.

Moreover, our School led campus efforts to provide more mental health services, including the expansion of Mental Health First Aid programming, led by our Behavioral Health Springboard initiative. As the pandemic continues, so will our work.

Although this wasn't the centennial celebration expected, the experience allowed us to demonstrate lessons learned over the past 100 years — how to adapt to change with resilience, to forge a path with creativity and leadership and to always care for those we serve. ■